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Chile-U.S.

¶11. A Gallup poll conducted in 17 Latin American countries shows that in Chile 72% of those polled have a positive image of President Obama and 59% approve of the U.S. government. This is 30% higher than the same poll in 2008 when George W. Bush was in office. The positive perception of the USG improved in 14 of the 16 countries polled in Latin America from 2008 to 2009. For example, in Argentina it increased from 10% to 42% and in Uruguay from 13% to 53%. At the regional level, 61% have a good impression of President Obama and 51% of the USG government. Nicaragua, Ecuador, and Bolivia are the only countries in the region that have a negative perception of both the U.S. president and of his administration (Conservative, independent La Tercera 12/3).

¶12. In a letter to the editor, the president of the Council of Scientific Associations of Chile, Jorge Babul, says that a recent editorial on the problems regarding the bidding and selection process that the government's scholarship program "Becas Chile" is facing fails to note that the program was put together "without the input of local universities, some of which have over 40 years of experience in graduate programs and agreements with educational institutions abroad" (La Tercera, 12/4).

Honduras

¶13. The electoral process in Honduras left winners and losers. Winners: Roberto Micheletti, who deceived everyone both domestically and abroad into believing that he would yield; Arturo Valenzuela, who would not have been confirmed if the United States had not recognized the election; and Senator Jim DeMint, who prior to the crisis was unknown outside U.S. congressional circles. Among the losers are OAS Secretary General Jose Miguel Insulza, who took sides without assessing the complexity created by Zelaya's illegal expulsion and the situation he had put himself in prior to his expulsion; President Lula da Silva, who did not take into consideration the implications for his country and the region of supporting Zelaya, therefore failing in his performance as a regional leader (La Tercera, 12/4).

¶4. Column: "Questions arise about the U.S. position... in Honduras, because it seems the outcome of a political pact between the Obama administration and the Republican Party.... This means that the new U.S. administration is giving priority to domestic considerations rather than to its fundamental and declared foreign policy principle of defending democratic regimes. This ambiguity is a wink of approval for those who want to oust elected heads of states... and puts U.S. credibility at stake. No one expects the United States to restore democracy in Honduras by sending expeditionary forces or troops. But the U.S. receives 70 percent of Honduras' exports and can, therefore, push many levers to demand the restoration of democracy" (Government-owned, La Nacion, 12/4).

¶5. Assistant Secretary of State for Latin America Affairs Arturo Valenzuela expressed the USG's "disappointment" with the congressional decision in Honduras not to reinstate Zelaya. Valenzuela, however, said that the decision had been "open and transparent" and in compliance with the Tegucigalpa-San Jose agreement. Along the same lines, president-elect Porfirio Lobo called on the provisional government to create a Truth Commission and another to verify the compliance of the agreement to pave the way for the renewal of relations with other countries (El Mercurio, 12/4).

¶6. In spite of the U.S. "disappointment" with regard to Honduras' congressional decision to keep Zelaya away from office, Assistant Secretary Arturo Valenzuela reiterated that "the next step should be to create a national unity government and Truth Commission to allow Honduras to return to the Inter-American community of nations" (Government-owned, editorially independent La Nacion, 12/4).

¶7. Column: "Brazil, the United States, and the OAS deserve Gold Medals for their poor handling of the election in Honduras ... The medal for political hypocrisy goes to Brazilian President Lula da Silva, who correctly stated that recognizing the election ... legitimizes an electoral process convoked by a non-democratic government. The problem with this argument is that most democracies in Latin America emerged from electoral processes convoked by governments who were involved in coup d'????tats.... But the epitome of Brazil's political hypocrisy is that just a few days ago Lula ... offered international recognition to Iranian strong man Mahmud Ahmadinejad ... who won an extremely questionable election... and whose government recently sentenced eight dissidents to death Plus, how can Lula demand international sanctions against Honduras and call at the same time to lift sanctions on Cuba? ...The medal for indecision goes to the United States. The Obama administration first joined Brazil and other Latin American countries in condemning the coup.... Then the Department of State said it would recognize the election because it would help regain full democracy... and more recently ... said Honduras has to establish a national unity government before it can lift sanctions. The gold medal for partiality goes to the OAS, which rather than condemning the coup and Zelaya for disavowing the resolution of his country's Supreme Court ... only campaigned in favor of Zelaya (Andres Oppenheimer, El Mercurio, 12/4).

Afghanistan

¶8. Over 20 countries with military presence in Afghanistan have already announced that they would be willing to send more troops to that country, said NATO spokesperson James Appathurai, adding that this was a "clear" signal of support for President Obama's new strategy (La Nacion, 12/4).

¶9. The Investigations Police IPR Crime Brigade reports that there are criminal organizations using methods employed by counter narcotics organizations to distribute illegal toys, clothings, and other products to the region. Containers arriving to the Valparaiso and San Antonio ports in the Fifth Region are for distribution in the Metropolitan Region, but those arriving to Iquique are for distribution to other South American countries. The PDI says that of those arrested for distribution of illegal products, 80% are either Chinese, Korean, or Taiwanese who have acquired resident visas. Since most are only fined and not imprisoned, they go back to the same activity in a short period of time (*El Mercurio*, 12/3).
SIMONS